

May 16-May 31, 2009

#### **INFRASTRUCTURE**

### **Earthquake Relief Efforts Help Shirzad Residents:**

The April 17 earthquakes in Shirzad District, Nangarhar Province killed more than an estimated 21 people and left countless others injured or homeless. USAID is currently constructing a road through the affected area and is committed to improving the lives of Afghans living nearby.

To help the residents of two earthquake-damaged villages along the road, Toto and Ashpan, USAID organized a distribution of blankets, school kits, and infant care supplies. Approximately 145 families, or nearly 1,000 individuals, were grateful to receive this aid from the American people. Additionally, USAID



Shirzad families receive earthquake relief aid. PHOTO: USAID/SPR-SEA

helped other international organizations distribute relief materials thanks to its strong connections with the local Shirzad communities, community development councils, and the provincial government of Nangarhar.

### **ECONOMIC GROWTH**

### **Carpet Cut and Wash Facility Opens in Jalalabad:**

Afghanistan's carpet industry, with its long tradition of producing beautiful, heirloom quality rugs, can significantly contribute to the country's economic development. However, until recently, carpet weavers and sellers have been unable to complete the carpet weaving process in Afghanistan due to the lack of a cut and wash facility. Cutting and washing is the final step of the process and transforms hand-woven carpets into final products ready for market.

Now, the full carpet weaving and finishing process can occur entirely within Afghanistan, thanks to the opening of the country's first cutting and washing



The Afghan Craft Cut and Wash Facility allows all steps of the carpet weaving process to occur in Afghanistan.

PHOTO: USAID/ASMED

factory: the Afghan Craft Cut and Wash Facility. Before the facility began operations, weavers had to send their carpets to Pakistan for this step, decreasing profits and eliminating the opportunity for carpets to be branded as 'Made in Afghanistan.'

The Jalalabad factory, which provides employment to 400 Afghans, is already gaining clients. Recently, factory representatives signed a contract with the Baghlani Carpet



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Weaving Company to cut and wash approximately 800 to 1000 square meters of carpet per month. The Afghan Craft Cut and Wash Facility is crucial to the strengthening of the carpet value chain, finally allowing the carpet sector to develop within the borders of Afghanistan.



Gemologists learn to identify real and synthetic gemstones.

PHOTO: USAID/ASMED

Afghanistan's First-ever Gemology Course Builds Skills: Afghanistan contains sizable deposits of precious and semi-precious stones, including emeralds, sapphires, tourmaline, and lapis lazuli, and the gem industry has the potential to be a major driver of economic growth. However, synthetic and imitation gemstones are flooding the market, and Afghanistan's gemologists are currently unable to recognize the fakes or guarantee gemstone authenticity. As a result, the country's potentially high-profit gemstone sector is not able to gain the trust of clients and increase revenues.

To build the capacity of local jewelers and gemstone dealers, USAID conducted Afghanistan's first gemology course from April 29-May 10. Taught by legendary 'gem-hunter' and gemologist Gary Bowersox, the course trained 30 participants (half of whom were women) from Kabul, Panjsher, Nuristan, Kunduz, and Bamyan provinces to recognize the difference between real and synthetic gemstones. The course will enable Afghan jewelers and gemologists to guarantee gem authenticity in order to build trust with clients, increase profits, and strengthen Afghanistan's gemstone industry.

Additional classes are planned for later in the year. These classes will serve Afghan men and women who are pursuing gemology teaching as a career, and those planning to gain further qualifications in the field for employment at the proposed Allied Training Centre of the British Gemological Association in Kabul and the future Kabul Gem Laboratory.

### **DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE**

#### **Access to Information Increases in Farah:**

Residents of Farah province in western Afghanistan started getting new programming on their radios and televisions in early May, thanks to the construction of new Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA) Farah studios. A new transmission tower and television antenna system have dramatically expanded RTA's signal, with villages up to 100 kilometers away reporting good reception of RTA's programming. The station was built as a joint effort by USAID, Internews



RTA Farah's new FM radio studio. PHOTO: USAID/Internews

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Network, and the Farah Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), demonstrating the effectiveness of coordinated assistance.

In remote areas like Farah, RTA broadcasting is often the only source of unbiased news for villagers. To boost the station's broadcasting capacity and provide more Farah residents with access to information, USAID helped the station relocate from an underpowered studio in the center of Farah City to a modern studio at the base of a mountain. The PRT constructed a two kilometer path and power line from the studio to the top of the nearby peak – and the delivery of necessary construction materials required 1,200 trips uphill by donkey.



Once the studio building was outfitted with modern FM equipment and a computer audio editing system, Internews trained RTA staff to use the equipment, conduct field interviews, and edit and air them. For some of the staff, this was their first introduction to a computer, but they quickly learned to use the equipment to produce informative programs for the people of Farah.



Mohammad Azam Tariq participates in a radio roundtable with other Ulema.

PHOTO: USAID/I-PACS

Religious Leaders Promote Civil Society: Building a strong, inclusive civil society in Afghanistan requires the participation and support of diverse communities, including its religious leaders. In particular, the Ulema (religious scholars) are a vital component of Afghan society and their opinions are very influential. As traditional agents of change at the local level, Ulema can educate followers and eliminate misperceptions held by the general public regarding civil society, the government, and women's rights.

In late April, USAID and Counterpart International conducted and aired two radio roundtables with Ulema to discuss civil society, democracy, women's role in society, and the upcoming elections. These were the first of many upcoming roundtables to enable Ulema to strengthen Afghan civil society and educate Afghans on a large scale. RTA Radio One broadcast the roundtables, which reached audiences in all of Afghanistan's 34 provinces.

During one of the discussions, Mohammad Azam Tariq, a member of Kabul University's religious academy and mullah at the Suhail Rumi Congregational Mosque, outlined the role of a diverse civil society and the concept of democracy from an Islamic point of view. "Democracy in Islam has long, deep roots, in which all human rights are respected, everyone is given the right to choose, and all are treated equally," he explained. Opinions



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such as Mr. Tariq's will reach many of his countrymen through radio, supporting healthy social discourse and the growth of a strong civil society in Afghanistan.

#### PROVINCIAL RECONSTRUCTION TEAM

New Reservoir in Jawzjan Provides Clean Drinking Water: Residents of Qazal Ayaq, a remote village in Jawzjan Province, now have access to clean drinking water thanks to a reservoir constructed by USAID. The new reservoir – the largest in Jawzjan – holds 1,485 cubic meters of water and will support four communities, or approximately 10,000 people. During the April 11 ceremony celebrating the completion of the reservoir, the community's Head Elder, the Mangajik District Governor, and the Rural Rehabilitation Director all thanked USAID for its support.



Qazal Ayaq residents inspect their new reservoir and hand pump.
PHOTO: USAID/PRT Mazari Sharif

Qazal Ayaq is located in an isolated area in with a dry climate, and the well water is salty and not appropriate for drinking. Before the construction of the reservoir, Qazal Ayaq residents had to buy drinking water or travel 20 km to fetch water from a neighboring town. Now, they have easy access to clean, safe drinking water in their own village.

#### **EDUCATION**

Women Faculty Members Unite at Kabul Education University: Building a strong community of professional women is an unfamiliar concept in many Afghan workplaces. However, some institutions, such as Kabul Education University (KEU), recognize the value of that women bring to the workplace and encourage their female employees advance their professional credentials and support each other.

On April 23, twenty-three female KEU faculty graduated from a USAID training course on problem solving and decision making. The course will

KEU's women faculty learn about decision making and unity.
PHOTO: USAID/HEP

ultimately enable Kabul Education University's faculty to design better, more interactive university courses for Afghanistan's future secondary school teachers.

During the training, participants learned about the decision making process and brainstormed ways to increase unity among women faculty members at the university. Each



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participant wrote and signed a commitment to doing one thing to increase unity, and many of the participants were excited to work together and help others. Several women joined together to propose providing literacy courses for the approximately 20 women employed as cleaners and cooks at the university.